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ABSTRACT

To date, community colleges have used two major approaches to manage transfer and assist students with a successful transfer experience: a "student service" approach, concentrating on counseling, advising, catalog information exchange, and other student affairs functions; and a "document" model, relying on articulation agreements, course equivalency guides, and systemwide regulations. A new approach to transfer education, the "academic" model, augments the work accomplished through these models. The academic model assumes that the strengthening of academic practices in relation to transfer education will result in enhanced transfer success--especially when undertaken as a shared enterprise between two- and four-year institutions. This model focuses on campus-based academic practices related to the curriculum, classroom teaching, and expectations of student performance, relying primarily on the work of two-year college faculty in the classroom, the relationship between two- and four-year college faculty, and student-faculty relationships at both institutions. The critical element is the emphasis on the shared development of curricula and pedagogy at two- and four-year institutions. Use of the model should not be part of a volunteer faculty activity, but part of a careful institutional plan. The model must also involve institutional data collection and analysis of transfer student behavior. A description of the use of the academic model by a hypothetical community college is included. (JMC)

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WORKING PAPERS

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This is the first of a series of "Working Papers" which will be issued by the National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer to address key issues, concerns, and challenges in community college transfer education.

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AN ACADEMIC MODEL OF TRANSFER EDUCATION

Transfer education in community colleges is becoming a topic of increasing importance to two- and four-year schools. This is related to a growing interest in the academic effectiveness of community college education and to social justice concerns regarding the extent to which community colleges function to assist students in achieving longer-range educational goals such as the baccalaureate. Historically, transfer education has been considered part of the fundamental mission and purpose of community college education and, in addition to occupational education, developmental/remedial education, and community-based programs and services, continues to play a significant role in community colleges offerings.

To date, community colleges have used two major approaches to manage transfer and assist students with a successful transfer experience. These may be described as a "student service" approach whereby institutions concentrate on counseling, advising, catalog information exchange and other student affairs functions to assist students in their transfer efforts and a "document" model or reliance on articulation agreements, course equivalency guides, system-wide regulation, or state policy or legislation to assist students. Both the student service approach and the document approach are intended to enable students to make transfer decisions with ease and to minimize the loss of credits associated with transfer activity.

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Whether or not community colleges are successful in carrying out their transfer responsibility is a matter of some debate. Because of extremely limited national data about transfer education and lack of agreement about what constitutes transfer behavior on the part of students, the various national estimates of the scope of transfer activity are, at present, of little help in determining the effectiveness of community college transfer efforts. A more important—and seminal—issue is the extent to which community colleges can, in the future, further fulfill their commitment as "Democracy's Colleges" by expanding their transfer function even beyond its current use. This is especially important for minority and disadvantaged students in community colleges.

What is an Academic Model?

An academic model of transfer education augments the work accomplished through use of the student service and document models. It is intended to be compatible with the more familiar approaches, not to supplant them. The academic model is predicated on the assumption that strengthening of academic practices in relation to transfer education—especially when undertaken as a shared enterprise between two- and four-year institutions—will result in enhanced transfer success for students.

An academic model of transfer education focuses on campus-based academic practices: what is done with curriculum, with classroom teaching, and with expectations of student performance. It relies primarily on the work of two-year faculty in the classroom, the relationship between two-year and four-year faculty, and the student-faculty relationship at both institutions. The academic model calls for scrutiny of curriculum and pedagogy to determine whether they enhance or inhibit transfer education for community college students. The academic model goes beyond expectations characteristic of articulation efforts that courses and programs already in existence need to complement one another to stress cooperative development of curriculum and academic performance expectations. It places primary emphasis on the building of curriculum used for transfer as a shared enterprise between two institutions as a fundamental mechanism for ensuring that community college students engage in learning activities which would be of greatest benefit in a four-year setting. The critical point is the emphasis on shared curriculum and pedagogical development as distinct from faculty from different institutions coming together after teaching and learning decisions have been made at their institutions.

In addition to the academic model's characteristic focus on academic practices and its emphasis on faculty collaboration, there are two other important dimensions of this approach to strengthen transfer. The academic model, to be genuinely significant within an institution, requires the support and commitment of institutional leadership and institutionalizing of those practices deemed to strengthen transfer. Use of the academic model should not be a volunteer faculty activity, but part of a careful institutional plan and commitment which reflects strong support for faculty and academic administration. Second, the academic model, to be truly meaningful in the determination of transfer success, needs to involve institutional data collection and analysis of transfer student behavior. This, in turn, requires consistent institutional use of a defensible transfer definition. The Center for the Study of Community Colleges directed by Arthur M. Cohen and Florence B. Brawer, with support from The Ford Foundation, is piloting a transfer definition for use by community colleges. On this definition, the transfer student population is made up of those students who have no prior college experience, who enroll in a community college and complete at least twelve college credits and who, within five years of their

entry to the community college, enroll in at least one course at a four-year college or university. This definition takes into account that students transfer under a variety of conditions and in varying time frames: they may or may not earn a degree and then transfer; they may complete their community college work in preparation for transfer in one year or in longer periods of time. Longitudinal analysis of this student population will provide benchmarks of transfer success and transfer limitations for a given institution.

The Academic Model Illustrated: Local Community College

The humanities faculty at Local Community College have decided that more of their students should be moving on to the nearby four-year college. They are convinced that strengthened skills in writing are important for this purpose. In order to identify the specific ways in which their writing instruction can produce this result, they invite some of their four-year humanities colleagues to meet with them to discuss the kind and level of writing skills needed by those students who transfer and complete the baccalaureate. The two- and four-year faculty work together to identify levels of writing effectiveness. They then identify the kinds of learning experiences they feel will be of greatest assistance to students in the community college classroom and coordinate these experiences with classroom practice at the four-year school. Four-year faculty also discuss with two-year faculty some of the pedagogical practices which two-year faculty found to be most effective in dealing with transfer students. The result of this collaboration in coursework and teaching is a rich, coherent and well-coordinated set of learning activities unimpeded by students attending two different institutions. The two- and four-year faculty also make use of this opportunity to review academic standards and expectations of student performance. This enables the two-year faculty to assist students at levels consistent with the work which will be expected at the four-year school. This enables four-year faculty to develop expectations of student performance based on good information concerning the two-year experience. Both institutions follow these students through their respective academic careers as a basis for judging the effectiveness of the curricular content which has been developed, the pedagogy used, and the academic expectations to which the faculty have agreed. Both institutions support the ongoing collaboration of faculty in this area and assist other disciplines and departments in the same pursuit.

In Summary, the Academic Model . . .

- emphasizes changes in academic practices as central to improving transfer;
- requires two-year/four-year faculty collaboration as essential to change in academic practices;
- stresses curriculum building and pedagogy development as points of critical intervention at which to change academic practices;
- calls for institutionalizing changes in academic practices;

- confirms the value of changes in academic practices through longitudinal data collection and analysis.

Transfer education in the community college reflects a longstanding commitment on the part of two-year institutions to provide social, economic, and intellectual mobility through a powerful combination of ease of access and emphasis on achievement. The academic model reaffirms that honoring this commitment is fundamentally a matter of the success of teaching and learning within our institutions.

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